

SANGEET NATAK AKADEMI'S DANCE SEMINAR



Dr. P.V. Rajamannar, Chairman, Sangeet Natak Akademi, delivering his inaugural address at the Dance Seminar. On his left is Miss Nirmala Joshi, Secretary of the Akademi.

Dr. Rajamannar's Inaugural Speech

“THE Sangeet Natak Akademi was established, according to the Preamble to its Constitution, to foster and develop Indian Dance, Drama, Music and Films and to promote through them the cultural unity of the country”, said Dr. P. V. Rajamannar, Chairman, Sangeet Natak Akademi, while inaugurating the Dance Seminar organised by the Akademi in New Delhi in March 1958.

The following is the full text of Dr. Rajamannar's inaugural speech:

It is with pleasure and pride that I rise to welcome you all to this Dance Seminar, I believe the first of its kind and scope.

I consider the establishment of the three

National Akademies, Sangeet Natak Akademi, Sahitya Akademi and Lalit Kala Akademi, soon after India attained the status of a Sovereign Republic, as a great act of State. It was a recognition of the important place that Literature and Arts should occupy in the life of a Nation. The Sangeet Natak Akademi was established, according to the Preamble to its Constitution, to foster and develop Indian Dance, Drama, Music and Films and to promote through them the cultural unity of the country. Among its objects are to be found promotion of research in the fields of Indian Dance, Drama and Music, the exchange of ideas and enrichment of technique between the different regions in regard to these Arts and revival and preservation of folk dances and folk music.

As you can imagine, the Sangeet Natak Akademi was, therefore, faced with a stupendous task, having regard to the vastness of the country and the bewildering cultural wealth which we have inherited. It will not be inapt if I compare the Akademi to a young man, who suddenly inherits untold wealth of many kinds, lands, houses, gold, jewellery, precious stones, etc. Even to take stock of the different items of wealth, to analyse and sort them would require time, patience, laborious work and expert advice and guidance. To augment the inherited wealth would be a much more difficult task. Likewise with the Sangeet Natak Akademi.

Limited Resources

For the first time, one Central Body had to first ascertain the varieties of Art forms prevalent in the different regions of India, to gather information regarding the practice of these Art forms and to correlate them, to bring out the essential cultural unity in what may appear to be a perplexing diversity. In view of the limited resources, chiefly financial, of the Akademi, it was obviously necessary to avoid duplication as far as possible. Matters which could be more effectively and directly dealt with by regional akademies had to be left to them. It, therefore, became the special function of the Akademi to canalise its activities and to approach the several problems from an all-India angle. That is why the Sangeet Natak Akademi has been sponsoring and organising functions from an all-India standpoint.

Music, Drama and Dance Festivals, sponsored by the Akademi, were on an all-India basis. They were designed to present the diversity of systems and traditions pertaining to different regions of this great country at one place and at one time.

The Seminars

The several Seminars organised by the Akademi have also been on this basis. In 1955, the Film Seminar, the first of its kind in the history of Indian Films, was held and it brought together some of the most eminent personalities in the world of films and experts in the several branches of the Film Industry.

Then came the Drama Seminar in 1956, at which well-known scholars and representatives came from different parts of India to discuss common problems and to reveal to each other the richness and beauty of each particular region or language in Drama.

In 1957, the Music Seminar was held. Here again, great exponents of the several systems of music obtaining in the North and South met together and discussed common problems pertaining to the Music of India.

Now this year, the Dance Seminar is being held. A glance at the programme will reveal to you the variegated nature of the subjects on which papers will be read by eminent scholars, and persons who have devoted themselves to the study of and research in Dance from the practical and theoretical and historical aspects. An attempt has been made to include expositions of classical as well as folk dances. Allied subjects like Bhagavata Mela, Yakshagana and Ballet have been included and dance forms which do not strictly belong to India but which have Indian origin or affinity, like the dances of South-East Asia or Kandyan dances. I hope I am not making an extravagant claim if I say that if anyone attends the Seminar from beginning to end, he will attain a comprehensive idea and knowledge of the different types of the classical and the folk dances of India.

Value of Seminar

The value of this Seminar will, in my opinion, be enhanced by the provision for demonstrations to accompany the reading of the Papers. I need not stress on the fact that theory and practice, *Lakshana* and *Lakshya*, should go together. As a sort of adjunct to the Seminar, the Akademi has arranged recitals of Dance in the evenings by well-known exponents of the several systems. I have no doubt that the Seminar will provide food for thought, and suggest ways and means to preserve and develop our manifold dance traditions as well as afford wholesome entertainment and aesthetic enjoyment.

On this occasion and before such a learned Assembly, I do not wish to attempt a learned discourse on any topic. But I wish just to say a few things which have been topmost in my mind.



The Prime Minister gave a reception in honour of the participants of the Dance Seminar. Picture shows Shri Nehru in an affectionate embrace with Shambhu Maharaj.

I have been noticing with considerable regret an attitude of intolerance on the part of devotees of one school or system of Dance towards the other schools or systems. This is accompanied by expressions of contempt and derision. I think that this attitude has its origin in a false belief that the system or school in which one has been trained is the only correct system or proper school and that all the others are wrong and improper.

An Appeal

Some of you are familiar with the differences—I can almost say hostilities—among the different *Gharanas* in Hindustani music in North India. My earnest appeal to all true lovers of Indian culture is to develop a sense of regard and respect for any authentic tradition, irrespective of personal, linguistic or regional attachments. In matters of religion, India has had a reputation for its tolerance and no true Indian, professing one faith, will ever hate or deride other faiths. I only pray that a similar spirit should pervade in the field of Art—of Music and of Dance.

I also hope that certain misconceptions will be cleared up at this Seminar. To give one example : A type of Dance, which had been perfected during the time of the Tanjore Rajahs in South India and under their patronage and which had come down to us, thanks to an unbroken hereditary succession of great Masters of the Art, has in recent times become known generally as Bharata Natyam. The name has come to stay and so no one need attempt to change it. But it is desirable to make certain things clear. In the first place, the term "Natya," as used in the *Natya Sastra*, ascribed to Bharata Muni, refers to drama and not to Dance, least of all to the solo dance, which today goes by the name of Bharata Natya. The origin of Natya, graphically described in the opening Chapter of the *Natya Sastra*, and its chief characteristics mentioned therein, leave no room for doubt that *Natya* refers to Drama. *Natya* is described as

*Nanabhavopasampannam Nanavasthan-
taratmakam*

Lokavrittanukaranam Natyam.

Another expressive phrase for *Natya* is *Natyam Vrittanta darsakam*.



Some of the participants in the Dance Seminar photographed at the Prime Minister's reception.

Bharata no doubt refers to Dance proper as *Nritta* or *Nritya*. Not only in the *Natya Sastra* but in later treatises like *Abhinayadrapanam* and *Sangeetha Ratnakara*, a distinction is clearly drawn between "Natya," *Nrtta* and "Nritya". *Natya* has been described as "Vakyarthabhinayatmaka" whereas *Nritya* is "Padarthabhinayatmaka". *Natya* is *rasa asrayam* *Nrityam* *bhavasrayam*, and *Nrttam* is *talalayasrayam*.

Gesture Language

In the *Natya Sastra*, Bharata does deal with Dance and Music too, but the treatise is in essence a treatise on dramatics. In the *Natya-Sastra*, Chapters VIII, IX, X, XI and XII, are devoted to gesture language, which is the special feature of Indian Dance which spread to far-off places, like Java and Bali and Indo-China, where they still survive. But references to *Hasthas* and *Karanas* and *Charis* are primarily from the point of view of Drama. There can be no doubt that the practice which prevailed in ancient days in the production of Drama was more conventional than realistic. There is

clear evidence of how the symbolical language of gesture must have been used largely in acting.

In one of the commentaries on *Sakuntala*, there are elaborate directions regarding the depiction of the several acts which had to be done by the actors and actresses, which make use of the gesture language that we come across in the *Natya Sastra* and in later text-books. For example for depicting *Sakuntala* when she is attacked by the bee; these are the directions: the head is in *Vidhuta* posture, the lips are *Kampita* and the turned down *Tripataka* hand near the mouth. Plucking of flowers is shown with *Uttana Arala* left hand and the *Hamsasya* right hand taken side ways. Whether the Code of Gesture, including movements perfected for the different limbs, was binding on the actors and actresses, it is difficult to say. But there must have been purists in those days, who insisted on a strict following of the Code.

A Misnomer

I have said all this because, these and other facts have convinced me that Bharata *Natyam*



Miss Nirmala Joshi, Dr.
P. V. Rajamannar and
Smt. Indira Gandhi at
the Prime Minister's
reception.

as it is now called is a misnomer, chiefly for two reasons:

- (1) "Natyam" is not a very appropriate term for the solo dance, which goes by the name of Bharata Natyam, and
- (2) Even if Natyam can be used loosely for mere dance, one cannot say that this is the only dance form, which is according to Bharata.

If it is said that the gesture language, the *Hashtas*, etc., which are mentioned in the *Natya Sastra*, are used in the so-called Bharata Natyam, and, therefore, the name may be justified, I have two observations to make:

- (1) This gesture language has not remained static. It has grown. It cannot be said that there is no departure from the rules and canons of interpretation laid down by Bharata.
- (2) These *Hashtas* etc., are also used as extensively in other types and systems of Dance as in Bharata Natyam. It suffices to mention Kathakali and Kuchipudi. *Hashta Lakshna Deepika* and *Abhinayadharpana* are the text-books, or, later treatises which certainly belong to the school of Bharata but which show certain divergences. Besides, in the Tanjore Saraswathi Mahal Library, there are several collections of texts relating to dance. Two of these have been published. One is *Natya Sutra Sangraha* and the other

recently printed and published, with the help of a grant from the Sangeet Natak Akademi, is the *Bharatarnava* attributed to Sri Nandikesvara. These and other books contain things not found in *Bharata Natya Sastra* but which have been in vogue in Tanjore and other neighbouring area—the original home of the present-day Bharata Natyam.

I have a fond desire. I hope that the revival of interest in the *Natya Sastra* will lead to the production of plays in the way in which Bharata envisaged them. I think Shrimati Rukmini Devi's productions, like Kutrala Kuruvanni, Kumarasambhavam, etc., are experiments in this direction, and deserve all praise.

Apart from the preservation of old traditions, is there no scope for the creation of new forms? I would answer 'Yes' provided the inspiration is genuine and the creation is authentic and original and not a mere imitation, as for instance, some of the Rock-in-roll dance sequences we see in modern Indian films. We have almost an infinite variety of folk dances which can inspire a talented choreographer to design and create new dance patterns.

I shall not take up more of your time. I now formally inaugurate this Seminar with the ancient invocation from Rigveda :

*Samano mantrah Samitih Samani
Samanam manah Saha Chittamesham
Samanam mantramabhimantraye vah
Samanena vo havisha juhomi.*